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# Dialogue not possible sans Imran: PTI

• Salman Akram Raja says Aleema Khan, Achakzai on same page; rues crackdown despite dialogue offer

• PTI leadership takes offence to being called 'terrorist sympathisers'; says it is against all forms of terrorism

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: The PTI will not engage in talks with the federal government without the involvement of its jailed founder Imran Khan, its Secretary General Salman Akram Raja said on Thursday, urging the authorities to cede some political space to the opposition party to ensure an environment conducive for the proposed dialogue.

The remarks, made by Mr Raja on *Geo News*, came amidst proposals by opposition leaders, including some ex-PTI men and federal cabinet members, for a dialogue to end political confrontation plaguing the country.

"Give us an agenda, tell us what topics will be discussed," he added. "We cannot negotiate in Imran Khan's absence. You cannot expect to put him in a black hole while everyone else talks… It will not happen like that."

"You cannot come into our house, attack us, loot us and then invite us for negotiations," said Mr Raja, as he claimed that the PTI was clear on its stance for talks.

Mr Raja recounted that between December 2024 and January 2025, they wanted to meet Imran and have him present at the talks, but that was not authorised.

When asked about whether talks would happen on January 12, as per Federal Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Mr Raja replied that he was not aware of the date.

**'On one page'**

In response to another question about differing party views on talks, Mr Raja emphasised that Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP) chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai and Imran's sister Aleema Khan were on the same page.

"They're saying the same thing: talks will only happen when the powers that be realise that the Pakistani people are tired of them and the system."

**More than words: Editorial on Page 6**

Mr Raja further added that Achakzai had travelled from Islamabad to Lahore today for street mobilisation, but claimed that the TTAP chief was stopped several times along the route and several PTI workers had been arrested and "someone had died".

"How can talks happen in this environment, if you are not willing to give even a little bit of political space?" he asked. "Negotiations do not happen in a graveyard or a jail, they require space."

**PTI against terrorism**

In a separate press conference, PTI leaders also responded to the army spokesperson's recent press conference, saying the party

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FLANKED by CM Sarfraz Bugti, PM Shehbaz Sharif listens as National Party chief Dr Abdul Malik Baloch speaks during a meeting between federal government functionaries and political leaders from Balochistan.—Courtesy PID

# Cooperation between Centre, provinces vital to overcoming challenges, says PM Shehbaz

• Premier visits Quetta to lay foundation stone of N-25 highway project; assures provincial lawmakers of peace, security • Says government to ensure peace in Balochistan by foiling conspiracies, defeating terrorism

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that strong cooperation between the provinces and the Centre was essential to address the economic and security challenges faced by the federating units, particularly Balochistan.

During his visit to the restive province where he was received by lawmakers from the treasury and opposition benches, the premier said his government would ensure peace and prosperity in the province by thwarting conspiracies and eliminating terrorists coming from the neighbouring countries.

The government and the opposition members seemed in harmony during the PM's visit. The spirit of cooperation was demonstrated on his arrival at the CM's House, when Opposition Leader Mir Younas Aziz Zehri and former chief minister Dr Abdul Malik Baloch accorded him a warm reception.

During the meeting, the PM said terrorists disrupting peace in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would be crushed. "National unity and strong federal-provincial cooperation were vital to overcoming Balochistan's security and economic challenges," he added.

**Terrorists using BYC platform to recruit youth: CTD — Page 5**

The PM paid tribute to the sacrifices of the armed forces, police, Frontier Corps and civilians in the fight against terrorism. He condemned the terrorist outfits and expressed regret over the support extended to terrorists by certain neighbouring countries. He also praised the military, saying, "The government and the military will not rest until terrorism is completely uprooted."

Reflecting on the 2010 National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, he recalled the consensus achieved under the leadership of Asif Ali Zardari and Yousaf Raza Gillani. He noted that Punjab had voluntarily contributed Rs11 billion annually from its share to Balochistan, amounting to Rs175 billion to date, in recognition of the province's vast distances and unique needs. He added that committees were currently working on a new NFC Award to ensure equitable resource distribution and strengthen the federation.

"This is our duty: to work with provinces — especially those that are very distant and experiencing challenges — this is the journey of brotherhood and cooperation which we all have to take," the premier reiterated.

"There are no two ways to go about it," PM Shehbaz stressed.

Earlier, the PM laid the foundation stone for the expansion of the Karachi-Quetta-Chaman National Highway into a modern four-lane carriageway. He said the Rs300 billion project would be funded through savings from the international petroleum prices. Often dubbed the 'killer highway', the artery is a site of frequent accidents.

Last year, the government increased the petroleum levy on products by Rs8 per litre and announced that the funding would be used for building and upgrading the 815km road project, formerly known as the RCD highway. The government had allocated Rs100 billion in the current year's budget for the project.

**Five Daanish schools**

According to the prime minister, the federal government will build five Daanish schools in the province to facilitate the underprivileged children and the initiative will be later expanded to other parts of the province.

The PM expressed satisfaction over the conversion

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# CDF vows zero tolerance for threats to national security

Dawn Report

LAHORE: Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir on Thursday emphasised the army's zero-tolerance policy towards any threats to national security, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Thursday.

According to the military's media wing, Field Marshal Munir made the remarks while addressing officers during a visit to Lahore Garrison.

He reaffirmed the military's resolve to respond to evolving challenges with professionalism and determination, it added.

**Bangladesh air chief meets CDF, other military leaders: Page 3**

"He said the armed forces remained committed to safeguarding Pakistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and internal stability, while promoting discipline, excellence and selfless national service," the statement said.

During the visit, where he was received by the Lahore corps commander, CDF Field Marshal Munir was given a comprehensive briefing on the formation's operational preparedness, training standards and key initiatives to enhance combat efficiency, it said.

The statement added that he witnessed a "specialised field training exercise showcasing the latest technologies, underscoring the army's emphasis on innovation, adaptability to

**Continued on Page 5**

# Feb 8 protest to pave way for talks, Imran's release: Achakzai

• TTAP chief asks people to join street movement, says alliance is against those who violate Constitution • PTI accuses Punjab police of crackdown, claims workers picked up in raids

By Mansoor Malik and Asif Chaudhry

LAHORE: The opposition alliance on Thursday urged the nation and political parties to support its wheel-jam and shutter-down strike to mark the second anniversary of the Feb 8 elections, saying the protest would also pave the way for talks with the government.

Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai, who led a caravan from Islamabad to Lahore, made these remarks in the provincial capital, where he had arrived to mobilise the party supporters for the Feb 8 protest call.

On the other hand, the PTI accused the Punjab police of a crackdown on its supporters ahead of the Achakzai visit, saying its workers were rounded up by the police in late-night raids while the caravan was also attacked by 'masked individuals' on its way to the provincial capital.

Speaking to reporters, Mr Achakzai said a powerful protest would exert pressure on the government to hold talks with the opposition and release its leader, Imran Khan.

"Slogans alone will not help release PTI founder Imran Khan from jail, but people rising up on February 8 and bringing the country to a standstill will," he said, urging the public to rise to get rid of parliament 'thrust' upon the country.

Answering a question about the dialogue process, Mr Achakzai said the path to dialogue would

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# Pakistan worst-hit by Taliban takeover of Kabul: International Crisis Group

Brussels-based think tank says Islamabad may strike Afghanistan again if militant attacks continue

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The International Crisis Group (ICG) says Pakistan is the worst-affected country by the Taliban's 2021 takeover of Afghanistan, noting that even though a ceasefire holds for now, Islamabad is likely to strike again if militant violence persists.

The Brussels-based independent and non-profit think tank, founded by prominent statesmen, says in a new report that relations between the two countries have tanked, mainly because of the Afghan Taliban's refusal to crack down on the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Since 2022, violence in Pakistan has spiralled. In 2025 alone, militants killed more than 600 Pakistani soldiers and police, mostly in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the two provinces bordering Afghanistan.

**Ties with Kabul hinge on anti-terror assurances: FO — Page 3**

**Terror kingpin's 'orders' vindicate Islamabad: Page 3**

Islamabad blames the banned TTP for these attacks, along with Baloch insurgent groups, which it believes with evidence, are backed by arch-rival India.

"UN monitors assert that the TTP enjoys Taliban support, but the Taliban publicly deny that Pakistani militants are even in Afghanistan and say Islamabad provoked what they paint as homegrown violence," according to the report.

On its western flank, after 11 Pakistani military personnel were martyred in a TTP attack on Oct 8, Islamabad conducted cross-border airstrikes, including its first-ever strike on Kabul, ostensibly targeting TTP chief Noor Wali Mehsud.

Afghanistan retaliated with attacks on Pakistani military installations. Continued fighting claimed military and civilian lives on both sides.

The report cautions that Islamabad is likely to lash out again if it traces another strike back to Afghanistan.

The Taliban regime is badly outgunned, but its retaliation could still be lethal. Kabul claims to have missiles that can reach Pakistani cities, the use of which would likely provoke an even stronger Pakistani response.

**South Asia**

In South Asia, however, Islamabad's foreign relations are far more fraught. After short wars in 2025 with both Afghanistan and India, another major

**Continued on Page 5**

# Riyadh says Yemeni separatist leader has fled

• Saudi-backed coalition tracks Al Zubaidi's escape by boat, then by plane • Presidential council ousts him; pursues high treason charges • Deep rifts emerge within Southern Transitional Council

Monitoring Desk/Agencies

ADEN: The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said on Thursday that southern separatist leader, Aidarous al-Zubaidi, has fled the country by boat, as government forces advanced on the port city of Aden.

The coalition said in a statement that Zubaidi travelled from Yemen to Somaliland, where he boarded an aircraft to Mogadishu. The coalition stated the plane was later tracked to a military airport in Abu Dhabi.

The Somali government announced it has launched an investigation to determine if its airports were used to transport a "political fugitive", a reference to Zubaidi.

FIGHTERS said to be backed by the Saudi-led coalition drive through the streets of the port city of Aden.—AFP

The country's Immigration and Citizenship Agency said that if this proved to be true, it would constitute a "serious violation" of national sovereignty.

Zubaidi's escape follows his failure to appear for crisis talks in Riyadh on Wednesday. His group, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), claimed he had been asked to go to Saudi Arabia under threat.

In a statement, the Saudi-led coalition provided further details about the flight from Somaliland. It said the aircraft turned off its identification system over the Gulf of Oman before turning it back on 10 minutes before its arrival at Al Reef military airport in Abu Dhabi.

The situation in Aden appeared stable on Thursday, with Saudi-backed Yemeni government forces patrolling the streets and no sign of STC forces, a witness told *Reuters*. Authorities have also imposed a nighttime curfew in the city.

Aden served as the seat of Yemen's internationally recognised government since Houthi forces seized the capital, Sanaa, in 2014, but leaders of the Saudi-backed government left Aden last month after the STC took control of the city.

The Saudi-led coalition first intervened in Yemen in 2015 to support the government against the Houthis, an intervention that led to one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The STC was established in 2017 and later joined the government coalition.

An STC delegation in Riyadh said it had held fruitful talks with the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, according to comments by Mohammed Al Ghaith, a senior official of the group.

Meanwhile, Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council on Thursday ousted the separatist leader from its ranks and referred him for investigation on charges of high treason after he fled the country, according to *Arab News*

The council held an emergency meeting, revoking Zubaidi's membership and dismissing two ministers, Transport Minister Abdulsalam Humaid and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Waed Badhib, from their posts.

The meeting also revealed a split within the STC, as one of its prominent members, Abdulrahman Al-Muharrami, attended the session that voted to oust Zubaidi.

Al-Muharrami's Giants Brigades forces have also been deployed to help prevent security breakdowns in Aden in coordination with the government, officials said.

## ON OTHER PAGES

### 42pc people unable to donate

Religious motivation for charity puts Pakistanis among the top donors in the world, but 42 per cent of people express their inability to donate due to financial constraints. This was revealed by the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy, an NGO, based on 'The World Giving Report 2025' and its own surveys and evaluation of over 5,000 not-for-profit organisations in the country. **Page 3**

### PSL adds two cities as new franchises

Sialkot and Hyderabad are set to feature in the 11th edition of the Pakistan Super League later this year after the two cities were picked as the new franchises of the league for a combined Rs3.6bn in a keenly contested auction. OZ Developers secured the Sialkot franchise with a record bid of Rs1.85bn per annum, while US-based FKS Group acquired the Hyderabad team for Rs1.75bn. **Page 18**